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REFLECTION THROUGH REVISION: A MASTER'S PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green

State University in partial fulfillment of

The requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English

With a specialization in

English Teaching

December 6, 2017

Professor Erin Labbie, First Reader

Professor Bill Albertini, Second Reader

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Master's Portfolio Introductory Narrative

Laura Hoebing

English 6910: Masters Portfolio

Dr. Erin Labbie, First Reader

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December 6, 2017

When I first embarked on my Master's degree journey, I was inexperienced in many ways, both professionally and personally. At the age of 24 I was just finishing my second year of teaching and was still trying to figure out how to be a responsible adult, much less an effective educator. In the span of my two-and-a-half year graduate education, I have changed teaching assignments twice, attended countless hours of professional development workshops, revised my pedagogy endlessly, gotten engaged and married, and have moved several steps up the ladder of "adulthood." In the past two and a half years, among the countless lessons about teaching, learning, and life in general that I have learned, I appreciate more than ever the idea of being a lifelong learner. As I reach the end of my graduate studies, I realize that while I may have more formal schooling than most Americans enjoy, I am still in the earliest stages of my lifelong education. The essays that follow are a representation of this chapter of my education and my growth as a student, teacher, researcher, and writer during this time.

As I compiled my essays for this portfolio, reflection emerged as a common theme in much of my writing and pedagogy. First, the process of selecting the essays was in itself a reflective experience for me as I thought back to past course experiences and examined the strengths and flaws of each essay. Second, I saw elements of reflection in my writing and recognized it as an important element of my teaching. The first essay, "Exploring Methods of Incorporating Reflective Writing in Secondary Education," is the strongest example of this theme. The essay was my final project for ENG 6800, Reflective Writing with Dr. Cheryl Hoy, which is the most recent course I have taken and one of the ones about which I was least knowledgeable at the beginning of the course. In choosing the focus for this class project, I was torn between a research-based paper and a pedagogy-based project. I had already completed several pedagogy-based projects during my coursework, and I was frustrated that while I worked

hard to write high-quality teaching plans, I rarely ended up using them because they did not fit in with the reality of my classroom. I did not want to invest time and energy into a project, whether it be research- or teaching-focused, that would not be practically applied in my teaching. As a result, I decided on somewhat of a hybrid between research and pedagogy. Rather than focus on developing one specific set of lessons I would likely never implement, I chose to research broadly and gather a wide range of ideas for teaching reflective writing in many different settings and for many different purposes. After completing Reflective Writing, I wanted to make reflective practice a habit in my classroom, not just a single unit. This collection of research gave me the tools to use reflection in a variety of contexts and for a range of purposes, particularly upper-level secondary or college-level courses. Unfortunately, I was unable to recover Dr. Hoy's feedback for this paper, so I focused my revisions on improving the quality of my writing at the sentence level. With Dr. Labbie's feedback, I worked to make my writing more active, synthetic, and concise. I used the same editing techniques for all of my papers, which both improved the writing quality and the communication of my ideas.

My second essay included in this portfolio, "Grammar Lessons for a Seventh Grade English Class," was written for Dr. Sue Carter Wood's course ENG 6220, Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing. When I took this course, I was in my second year of teaching middle school English, and my fourth year of teaching overall. I was unhappy with the outdated grammar curriculum I inherited, and I was fascinated by the opportunities for the new, relevant, meaningful ways to teach grammar that Dr. Wood's course presented. I developed these lessons in an attempt to update the curriculum and improve my students' understanding and use of grammar concepts. As I revisited this paper with the portfolio in mind, I noticed the theme of reflection in the way I incorporated previously read stories with a grammar focus. This strategy

allows students to return to a familiar text but with a new purpose, which adds depth and complexity to their appreciation of the text. Dr. Wood gave me very positive and supportive feedback, so my revisions were minimal. I added a brief summary of the texts I was using and adjusted some of my diction. Dr. Wood also suggested a resource for me to consider, which I did, but it did not seem to be a useful addition to the curriculum. A book she recommended contained strategies to help students understand what made an “okay” sentence, but the strategies seemed to be below my students’ general level of understanding, so I did not incorporate that feedback into my revision. Most of my students already have a strong understanding of what makes a complete sentence, so while I may use some of the strategies in individual instruction, I did not see a need to build it into the whole-group curriculum.

The third selection in this portfolio serves as my exemplary pedagogy-based project. I wrote “A Research-Supported Writing Curriculum for Junior High” for Dr. Lee Nickoson’s ENG 6200, Teaching Writing. This paper focuses on the junior-high level specifically and reflects my desire to update and improve the original curriculum. When I returned to this paper while compiling the portfolio, I reflected on my implementation of these lessons and how they worked, failed, or were never even attempted in my own teaching. With this experience in mind, I made some minor adjustments to the lessons and reminded myself of some good ideas I had not yet implemented. Additionally, I looked toward the future in an effort to keep these lessons as relevant and useful as possible. Currently, our district is experimenting with standards-based grading, so I revised this paper with that change in mind. My adjustments included adding a description of standards-based grading as it would apply to this curriculum and tweaking any assignments that needed to change to fit standards-based grading expectations. Fortunately, I had already aligned each assignment with specific standards so the adjustments were minimal. In

addition, I used Dr. Nickoson's feedback to clarify some wording and develop an introduction that addressed her comment: "I wonder: did you find the theories at all competing for attention or perhaps disjointed approaches to teaching writing? It seems expressivism and collaborative pedagogy drive much of what you include here. Student voice and social, team-based research and writing read as the principle skills/experiences for your students." In response, I addressed the role of reflection and how I see the various pedagogical theories working together in harmony.

The final project in this portfolio, "The Various Roles of the Police in Contemporary Domestic Noir Fiction," functions as my substantive research project and was written as the final project for ENG 6800, Haunted Women in Literature, with Dr. Piya Pal Lapinski. Neither this project nor the course were teaching-related, but the research experience was useful to my teaching practice because I fully resumed the role of student-researcher and was able to experience once again the research and literary analysis process I expect of my students. This experience refreshed my understanding of my students' process and potential struggles as I experienced them myself, which helped me feel more in-touch with what I ask my students to do. In addition, writing this paper required me to delve further into the research process than any other project that I have completed during my education, and at times I struggled and triumphed in finding relevant sources for my chosen topic. This also helped me recognize how to teach well. I was genuinely intrigued by my topic, which inspired me to persist through a difficult and rewarding research and analysis process. I was working with two relatively new texts, neither of which had much scholarly work published about them in general, and no scholarly work that I could find published about my specific topic within these texts. While this lack of sources made my research process long and frustrating, it was rewarding for me to push myself to make my

own analysis and relate these texts to the sources I could find rather than relying on the work of others to support my thesis. I received minimal feedback on my finished paper from Dr. Lapinski, but given additional time to revise during the portfolio process and with the help of Dr. Labbie's input, I was able to make significant improvements to the overall quality of this paper. Most of my revisions focused on sentence structure and clarity, which were recurring areas of revision throughout all four papers. While this paper does not directly relate to reflection in the same way as the other four papers, the revision process was an opportunity for me to conduct my own reflection in the role of a student, which enriched my understanding of a student's writing and revision experience.

The four papers included in this portfolio reflect my work and growth throughout my graduate career. Not only have my writing skills improved (as seen through the revisions), but my pedagogy has also improved by developing the habit of being a reflective practitioner. These projects are the products of learning opportunities that pushed me to deeper thinking and led me to greater understanding of what it is to teach and learn. Teachers cannot rely solely on sound pedagogy, though; good teachers have a broad and deep knowledge base of their content area, and my graduate studies have contributed in this area as well. Throughout my studies, I was able to explore various aspects of literature, writing, and theory that will inform my instruction. With this knowledge and my improved understanding of pedagogy, my education has given me the tools to become a more effective practitioner, and these four papers are evidence of my growth.

Exploring Methods of Incorporating Reflective Writing in Secondary Education (Revision)

Laura Hoebing

ENG 6800: Reflective Writing

Dr. Cheryl Hoy

August 1, 2017

Lately, “Reflection” has become a bit of a buzzword in education. Teachers are often encouraged to be “reflective practitioners,” keeping daily notes or journals. Reflection has also been adopted into some ELA standards, and writing prompts often instruct students to reflect on the topic at hand. With reflection tossed around so frequently, one might expect teachers and students to be comfortable with it early on, but in reality the definition of reflection remains murky because reflection can mean different things to different people. With these unclear expectations, students often miss true reflection in an attempt to guess what the teacher wants, especially at the secondary (6-12) level. Fortunately, the growing popularity of reflection has also led to increased research on the topic that helps to clarify ambiguities about it. Investigating the theories, methods, and issues surrounding reflection can help secondary teachers incorporate reflection as a regular habit in their classroom through explicit instruction and varied exercises.

To begin exploring methods of teaching reflective writing, one must first define reflection itself. John Dewey did this first in his 1910 book *How We Think*, and many researchers still frame discussion using his definition of reflection as, “The kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration” (Thomsen 15). From Dewey’s definition, Carol Rodgers distilled the following criteria for reflection:

- 1) Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.

- 2) Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
- 3) Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
- 4) Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. (15-16)

While these criteria provide a more concrete and accessible starting point for a discussion of reflection, their suggestion that reflection can be completed in distinct steps and with clear goals may be misleading. In reality, reflection often occurs in a non-linear process, and can appear in any number of forms. For example, reflection could mean a “writer’s memo” looking back on the writing process and final product, portfolios, cover letters, journals, or logs, in which students “consider their own writing processes as well as rhetorical strategies with audience, voice, and style” (20). While Rodgers’ criteria provides a starting point to a discussion of reflection, it leaves the possibilities for reflection very open, which can, in turn, propagate confusion among students and teachers.

The first struggle students face in trying to reflect is not reflecting often enough to become comfortable with it. When teachers use reflection only as a wrap-up activity with no explicit instruction on how to reflect, the focus becomes the product rather than the process of introspective thought. Kathleen Blake Yancey suggests that reflection is “both process and product... ‘A component not only threaded through, but *woven into* the curriculum’ (qtd. in Thomsen 22). Reflection needs to move beyond a final activity, part of course evaluations, or an afterthought to wrapping up a unit. Rather, reflection can become a key component of an entire course, which will help students learn to think critically and independently while also helping them understand their own learning process through reflecting on their experiences.

A second problem students face while writing reflectively, Thomsen argues, is that they may not realize when they are being asked to reflect. Frequently teachers use synonyms, but the discussion of reflection must be explicit. If we include reflection in our courses but instead call it “zooming in on a situation,” writing a process description, or revising and generating within compositions, students will not know explicitly what they are doing, and will be less likely to transfer reflective skills to and from other experiences that would help them reflect successfully (25). If students do not realize that these synonyms all mean reflection, they may not utilize their previously learned reflective skills effectively. Rather, teachers should use the term reflection specifically and use synonyms only after students understand they are being asked to reflect.

The third roadblock to effectively teaching reflective writing is that teachers often do not actually teach reflective writing at all. Instead, we ask students to reflect on a topic or activity without realizing they may not know what reflection means. As a result, especially with inexperienced students, we receive “reflections” that are off-base, simply summarize information, or do not reach the desired depth of thinking. To combat this problem, teachers explicitly need to instruct students how to reflect. Several researchers have investigated various methods of explicit instruction in reflective writing. As with anything else, beginners will require the most support, and Kerri-Jane Burke suggests using what she calls the 3D model—Describe, disclose, decide. These three parts are open to adaptation for different writing situations: for example, as a bell-ringer, unit wrap-up, self-assessment, discussion warm-up, or way to stay focused during presentations. The model could be used for brief activities or longer writing assignments since each of the three sections can be modified as needed. Describe, the first section, is a short description of key points to get students re-engaged with the topic. Burke warns to place strict limits on this section to avoid a rambling summary, and even suggests being

as specific as ‘Write one sentence for the title, author and year. Write another sentence for the purpose and content ...’ (xvi). “Disclose” should be the longest section, where students give specific details and link them to their own thoughts and feelings. She suggests using modeling to direct students towards certain topics or discussions. Teachers could provide sentence beginnings or frameworks such as “technique + example + explanation” (xvi). Finally, students end the reflection with “decide,” an evaluative and/or concluding comment. This model can be adapted in many ways, including as a format for blogs. It is highly structured and does not leave much room for freedom, which is commonly associated with reflective writing. While the structure may be restricting to experienced (older) students, it provides an excellent first step into reflection for younger students by teaching them how to reflect without retelling.

Blogs are a possible tool for beginning reflective writing, but they need to be used in the appropriate context. Blogging is a great way for students to publish their work to a larger audience and receive feedback from more people, but students may not always benefit from this writing setting. In fact, in a research experiment involving college sociology students Drew Foster discovered that students were

...More likely to take intellectual risks in blogs, which they know will be read and commented upon by their peers. Conversely, journals—the more private option— compel students to be vulnerable and take more personal risks in their reflection.... In blog posts, students were significantly more likely to take a position on a controversial issue and to develop a personal theory about the social world....On the other hand, explaining a misconception or linking the material to a personal experience—two of the practices journals more frequently elicited— constitute more personally risky forms of reflection.

(111)

While neither method definitively produces higher-quality reflection, each has its own benefits and should be used accordingly. Blogging can be an excellent tool for fostering intellectual debates, but teachers must be careful with what information is publicly available. Students also need to be aware of internet safety protocol, especially when dealing with minors. To avoid privacy breaches with younger students, teachers can assign students aliases that are used on publicly visible blogs, although this safety feature may detract from the aforementioned benefits of peer readership.

Reflective writing may seem most appropriate in a literature or creative writing classroom, but in fact it can be used in nearly any subject area. Holly Lawrence describes several strategies for using reflection in a business course with a range of minor and major assignments. She suggests that reflective writing could be used to craft personal mission statements, which can be a starting point for a resume or cover letter, or an assignment by itself. By writing reflectively about themselves and their experiences, students are also more prepared for interviews, elevator speeches, and finding a job that best fits their interest (201). Students can also complete reflective writing as a method of self-assessment to identify strengths, weaknesses, and goals for improvement, all of which is important in the business world.

In an even bigger departure from the English classroom, McDonald and Dominguez suggest that reflective writing can and should be used effectively in science classes as well. Since many science classes already use journals of some kind, students could utilize the left-hand pages of the notebook as a reflective space. Here, students could record thoughts, questions, or areas of confusion that would help the teacher better address the class's needs. These spaces could be very unstructured, or the teacher could provide guiding questions or prompts to direct the reflection. In addition, students could use prompts in small groups as collaborative

assignments. This technique cuts down on the grading load and allows students to solve problems and discuss together. Finally, students could write a guided reflection paper based on a series of questions about a process or experience. These reflections will help students develop critical thinking, improve self-examination skills, and reinforce understanding of underlying concepts (48-49). Although the sciences tend to focus on more data-driven methods, reflection can serve as a valuable learning tool.

Reflective writing has several benefits for students in various age groups and subject areas. Students are better able to retain and comprehend course information, take more risks in the “safe space” of journal entries, and learn more about themselves and where they might best belong in the future workplace. In addition, teachers are able to receive more feedback about student strengths and areas of confusion. Elizabeth Spalding and Angene Wilson identify these additional benefits for students: “(1) journals serve as a permanent record of thoughts and experiences; (2) journals provide a means of establishing and maintaining relationship with instructors; (3) journals serve as a safe outlet for personal concerns and frustrations; and (4) journals are an aid to internal dialogue” (1396). For instructors: “(1) journals serve as windows into our students’ thinking and learning; (2) journals provide a means of establishing and maintaining relationship with students; and (3) journals serve as dialogical teaching tools” (1396). While not every student may benefit from all reflective writing, they will likely succeed from common language, explicit instruction of definitions, discussion of reflective writing, and writing models.

Reflective writing can also have benefits for students beyond the limits of a single course. In Katheryn L. Anderson’s study “Effects of Participation in a Guided Reflective Writing

Program on Middle School Students' Academic Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulated Learning Strategy Use," she found:

Although statistical analyses of the data collected from the academic self-efficacy inventory were inconclusive, there were differences between the treatment group and control group in actual performance. The learners in the treatment group improved their task completion and improved grades. The learners were more aware of the strategies that they used to complete the district assessment than the students in the control group. (131)

Additionally, "The students who responded to the writing prompts appeared to be more aware of the strategies they used to complete the district assessment. They also improved their grades in their classes to a greater extent than the students in the control group" (133). Because the students were better able to understand and evaluate their own learning processes, they were more apt to improve their performance both in class and in the standardized writing setting.

The scope of this paper is restricted to teaching reflective writing rather than writing reflectively oneself, but teachers and students will also benefit from reflective teaching. Teachers often attest they lack the time or energy to write reflectively on top of other teaching duties, but David Purcell argues reflective teaching does not need to be an onerous task. He suggests instead teachers who feel overwhelmed could start with reflecting on only one course or aspect of teaching, or brief notes for all classes (15). He stresses that there is no correct way to reflect, but teachers can adapt his time-tested method for their own availability. He suggests an outline including: header (date, course, point in semester, etc.), general assessment and contextual variables (environmental factors, temporal factors, instructor's mental state), evaluating the effectiveness of the class, revisions for the future, and significant course changes. (Appendix 1). Teachers will notice the benefits of these reflections over time as they are better able to plan and

prepare for future classes, notice trends, and become more conscientious of their own actions as a teacher.

Reflecting on our teaching practices is important, but it is not the only way reflection can help teachers instruct more effectively. We expect students to write for a variety of voices, audiences and purposes, but we can lose our ability to teach that skill when we ourselves are out of practice. Margie Krest suggests that we must rediscover the joy of writing by experimenting and pushing ourselves to grow through enjoyable, yet challenging, reflection. Krest argues from her own experience writing reflectively, “Perhaps as we strive to be reflective writers... we will deepen our understanding of writing and of ourselves as writers, thus gaining a realistic perspective which we can bring to the classroom and which will enable us to be more flexible, more empathetic, and more open to our students as writers in their own right (24). While her story is anecdotal rather than empirically demonstrated, it is easy to envision the truth in her statement. Teachers, especially those who are no longer students themselves, can easily lose touch with our students’ experiences as growing writers. Keeping in touch with those challenges and victories as writers ourselves will demonstrate the reality and relevance of what our students are feeling.

While “reflection” may have become a buzzword in education in recent years, it is easy to see why reflective writing needs to be embraced as more than just a passing fad. Reflective writing can help students achieve more in class, become more aware of their own learning experiences, and prepare themselves for the future workplace. These experiences benefit all students and can be applied across content areas. Clearly, a teacher cannot possibly adopt all of the reflective writing exercises outlined in this paper, but it provides a place to start envisioning what reflection can look like in many different forms and subjects, and many of them can easily

be adapted for other grade levels or content areas. Teachers must decide what and how to adopt, but it is imperative to engrain reflective writing as a core objective and regular habit. Although reflection may look different in every classroom, it belongs in each one of them.

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Grammar Lessons for a Seventh Grade English Class (Revision)

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ENG 6220

Dr. Sue Carter Wood

December 14, 2016

Rationale: Due to the expectations of the State Standards, class time is torn between the study of literature and writing. There never seems to be enough time to cover everything adequately, but regardless of these constraints, the standards must be met. To help me achieve this balance, I will bundle writing, literature, and grammar in these lessons, which are designed to be taught at various points throughout the year according to students' needs and progress. Some of the lessons build on each other and they generally grow in complexity, but they are meant to be used in the context of larger writing projects rather than being used together as a discrete grammar unit. I will be addressing grammar repeatedly throughout the year and focusing on key issues as I see them arise. These lessons will also be designed to build students' grasp of grammar complexity over the course of the year. I will be using sample texts, modeling, active participation, and reflective editing to reach students in various formats throughout these lessons. I am using sample texts from the literature we study in class so students are already familiar with the text and can focus on appreciating the grammatical features rather than focusing on comprehension.

Key elements of teaching context: My lessons are directed toward my 7th grade English class. Our classes are 57 minutes long, 3-4 times a week on a rotating schedule. I have two sections of students, and my curriculum is based on the Minnesota State Standards (a supplemented version of the Common Core State Standards). My students generally struggle to apply their limited knowledge of grammar in writing, and in grammar exercises they vary from being very competent to struggling with even basic concepts. My goals are to prepare students for future classes with a foundational knowledge of grammar concepts and to teach students to use grammar concepts to improve their skills in both creative and academic writing. Unless otherwise noted, all reading selections mentioned in these lesson plans are from our English 7 textbook, *The Language of Literature*.

Lessons:

1. Complete Sentences- This lesson will focus on what it takes to make a complete sentence, including subjects, verbs, and objects. Students will work in small groups to “play around” with sentences, rearranging and rewriting ineffective incomplete sentences to make them complete and effective. I

will create an anonymous list of ineffective sentences from students' previous work in the class, and in groups of 2-3 students will label the subject, verb, and/or object of the sentence to discuss what is missing and why the sentence is incomplete. They will then rewrite the sentence to make it complete and effective. Groups will share their revisions in a class discussion so we can compare different revision choices from different groups.

Rationale: By using students' own sentence fragments, the samples will be authentic and at an appropriate level for the class. Students may even recognize their own sentences and learn how to make them more effective. These sample sentences will contain common mistakes from the students, and students will be able to work in groups to hear different opinions about ways to change the fragments into complete sentences. Students will also be able to consider several options by hearing different groups' choices. This will also help students understand they have choices in their writing and grammatical moves.

2. Fragments- This lesson will draw on lesson #1 and deal with effective vs. ineffective fragments.

Students will find fragments in two sample texts and judge their effectiveness. We will discuss when and why a writer might choose to use a fragment and why they might be more effective in some places than others. We will also discuss different types of fragments—interjections, descriptions, repetitions, etc. Students will identify which types of fragments are found in the sample texts and what effect those fragments have on the writing, as well as comparing these effective fragments from the ineffective fragments discussed in lesson #1. Students will then write a short composition (half a page or so) containing at least two effective fragments. After writing, students will reflect and share their thoughts about the effectiveness of their own sentence fragments.

Reading materials: Excerpt from “Dirk the Protector” by Gary Paulsen and “Thank You, M’am,” by Langston Hughes

Summary: “Dirk the Protector” is a short nonfiction story about a boy who lives on the street. He encounters a dog who growls at him and gives the dog half a hamburger to escape him. A gang of thugs attacks the boy, but the dog protects him. The boy shares more food with him and from then on the dog becomes his bodyguard, even following him to a farm and taking on a job of protecting a flock of sheep.

“Thank You, M’am” is another short story that features a boy in unfortunate circumstances. The boy tries to steal the purse of Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, who catches him and realizes he does not have any parents at home. She takes him back to her apartment, washes his face, feeds him supper, and teaches him a lesson of right and wrong. Dialect and sentence fragments create to the strong characterization in this story, which provides an opportunity to discuss writing choices and style in addition to the literary elements of conflict and character development.

Rationale: Students will see both fiction and non-fiction examples from our literature textbook, and will see various types of effective fragments represented. Students will have a chance to apply these ideas in a short piece of writing immediately and reflect on their effectiveness, and these ideas can easily be brought up again as reminders in future writing situations as well. This is a good opportunity to build on our previous lesson so students can understand why an author would choose to break the “rule” of using only complete sentences and how effective fragments differ from ineffective ones.

3. Connectors- This lesson will focus on ways to combine and connect phrases and clauses to build more complex sentences. We will identify different types of sentence-level connectors and when/how they are used using the PowerPoint below (see Weaver 191-195), then judge how effectively connectors are used in “The Scholarship Jacket” by Marta Salinas. Students will then rewrite their paragraph from lesson 2, finding places they can use connectors to combine ideas and sentences. To challenge students to apply their new knowledge, I will require them to use some kind of connector in every sentence. After writing, students will write another paragraph reflecting on their revisions, why they chose to make the changes they did, and the effect they saw on their writing.

Connectors

Information adapted from *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* by
Constance Weaver

Transitions

- Signal Sequence
 - Again, also, and, and then, besides, finally, first/second/third, furthermore, last, moreover, next, still, too
- Signal time
 - After a while, after, as soon as, at last, before, immediately, later, now, since, soon, then, until
- Signal comparison
 - Again, also, in the same way, likewise, similarly
- Signal contrast
 - Although, but, despite, however, instead, on the other hand, regardless, still, though, yet
- Signal examples
 - After all, for example, for instance, such as, specifically
- Signal cause and effect
 - Accordingly, as a result, because, hence, so, then, thus
- Signal place
 - Above, below, next to, here, there, to the right/left of
- Signal concession
 - Granted, naturally, of course, it may appear that
- Signal summary/repetition/conclusion
 - As a result, as we have seen, in any event, in other words, in short, therefore

Coordinating Conjunctions

- For
- And
- Nor
- But
- Or
- Yet
- So
- These words can be used with a comma to combine two independent clauses or other grammatical elements of the same kind

Examples

- We went fishing, hiking, **and** swimming last weekend.
- Afterwards I was tired **yet** happy.
- I like Lisa, **but** her brother is annoying.
- We ate rice **and** beans for supper.
- Would you like to go skating, **or** would you rather stay home?

Joining and Separating Independent Clauses

- Use a period to separate
 - Daryl scored the winning touchdown. Afterwards the team went out to celebrate together
- Comma+coordinating conjunction
 - Daryl scored the winning touchdown, and his teammates carried him off the field
- Colon
 - It was amazing: Even some members of the losing team cheered the winners.
- Semicolon
 - The cheerleaders jumped and shouted; the crowd roared
- Semicolon+conjunctive adverb
 - Daryl tried to avoid the media; however, three reporters immediately stuck their microphones in his face
- Period+conjunctive adverb
 - Daryl tried to avoid the media. However, three reporters immediately stuck their microphones in his face.
 - Daryl tried to avoid the media. Three reporters, however, immediately stuck their microphones in his face.

Correlative Conjunctions

- Both/and
 - Both Jim and I aced the test.
- Either/or
 - Either do the dishes or take out the trash after supper.
- Just/so
 - Just as I loved the movie, so did I enjoy the dinner.
- Neither/nor
 - Neither Mom nor Dad agreed we should get a puppy.
- Not only/but also
 - Not only is she lazy, but she is also spoiled.
- Whether/or
 - Whether you like it or not, you need to do your homework.

Conjunctive Adverbs

- These words join together simple sentences, but also work as adverbs (modify meaning). They don't necessarily have to be used as connectors
 - Also, besides, hence, indeed, instead, then thus, accordingly, consequently, furthermore, however, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, therefore, as a result, for example, for instance, in fact, of course, on the other hand

Punctuation

- Period
 - Completely separates and removes any relationship between two independent clauses
- Comma
 - Used with a conjunction to combine ideas
- Semicolon
 - Used to separate (like a period) and relate (like a comma) without a correlating conjunction
- Colon
 - Used to separate two ideas

Reading Materials: “The Scholarship Jacket” By Marta Salinas

Summary: Martha is a promising eighth grade student who is on track to win the school’s highest academic honor—a scholarship jacket. One day Martha hears two teachers arguing over the award. Mr. Schmidt is in support of Martha’s achievements, but Mr. Boone argues that Joann’s father is on the Board and owns the only store in town. Mr. Schmidt storms out, and the next day Martha is called to the office and told she will have to pay \$15 if she wants the jacket. Martha’s grandparents, who are raising her, can afford it, but refuse the payment on principal. Martha tells the principal their decision and blurts out that they will have to give the jacket to Joann. The principal reconsiders and eventually decides that Martha can have the jacket after all. This story contains a strong positive theme for literary study, as well as a writing style that features different types of connectors.

Rationale: This lesson will provide background information, examples, and an opportunity to apply new information in the context of writing. Students will see and study various types of connectors used in a familiar story, and they will be able to focus on applying connectors in their writing exercise as well since they already have written the content. Students will also be prompted to reflect thoughtfully, which deepens their interaction with this new knowledge.

4. Run-on Sentences- This is another extension of lesson #1 and is based on Noden’s suggested strategy of “Play with Run-Ons.” First, we will look at several examples of ineffective run-on sentences from students’ own work (collected from previous assignments). We will then read a brief excerpt from Wolfe’s *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* as published in *Image Grammar* and compare the effectiveness of this paragraph to students’ work. As a class, we will discuss the differences we note and the effects created by Wolfe’s rhetorical moves. Students will then have a chance to write their own effective run-on paragraph. Students will choose from a variety of hectic scenarios, envision the scene and its surrounding details, and write a one-paragraph description of the scene. Students will then have the opportunity to share their writing and discuss the effectiveness of their writing choices with the class.

Reading Materials: Excerpt from Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*

Rationale: Comparing students' previous use of run-ons with Wolfe will give them an idea of what to do and what not to do when writing run-ons for a desired effect, as well as how to avoid ineffective run-ons. Students will also have an opportunity to share their writing, so the class can see a variety of different choices and styles. Students who choose to share will receive feedback, and students who struggled with the assignment will see examples of how other students were successful.

5. Commas- We will discuss the five types of commas as discussed by Schuster in *Breaking the Rules* (155-159) by identifying the five types and coming up with example sentences for each one. We will then view their use in context by identifying them in "Zebra" by Chaim Potok. I will then give students sentence "chunks" and commas printed on pieces of paper. A group of students come to the front of the class and work together to arrange the sentence and place the commas appropriately. The group will be challenged to find other arrangements they could use by rearranging, adding, or subtracting from the sentence. The class will discuss the options and which arrangement might be most effective. How might communication be hindered if the commas are not placed effectively? Working individually, students will apply this lesson to their previous writing by returning to their passage from Lesson #2 and revising it, using commas in each of the most common ways.

Examples of sentences in chunks (will be provided to students out of order):

1. Because he had been reading my letters without my knowledge , I was quite angry with him.
2. Dr. Jones , my dentist , told me brushing my teeth , flossing my gums , and drinking milk would improve my dental health.
3. Furthermore , the teacher facilitates learning and collaborates with the learners , instead of dispensing information and testing students on it.
4. Grant , the son of a tanner on the wester frontier , was everything Lee was not.
5. Most of the time , travelers worry about their luggage.

Reading Materials: "Zebra" by Chaim Potok

Summary: Adam “Zebra” Zebrin loves to run, until he is hit by a car and injured. While Adam is recovering both physically and mentally, he sees a one-armed man digging through the trash outside of school. The man turns out to be an art instructor and invites Adam to join his art class, which helps him re-connect to the world and discover more about himself. Along the way, Adam learns that the art teacher, Mr. Wilson, was injured in the Vietnam War and the two bond over their injury experiences. This story provides rich opportunities for developing inference skills and exploring characterization. While commas are not exactly a key feature of this story, it provides a good example of comma use in an authentic context. Discussion can also be enriched by discussing the literary elements at work on a larger scale and how the individual sentences and grammatical choices contribute to the overarching features.

Rationale: This lesson will demonstrate the various ways of using commas and the importance of their placement. Students will be prompted to think creatively with their grammatical choices and will see examples of different comma uses in a published work. Commas are not usually something readers take much notice of, but as writers students must be careful in their usage. This will be demonstrated through our discussion of various arrangements and choices in the small group exercise. Students will also be able to be more conscientious of their punctuation choices as they revise their writing because they will not need to worry about the content since it is already written.

6. Participles- Students are great at piling on adjectives and adverbs, but often their descriptions do not really add to their writing. This lesson will be aimed at trying Noden’s brush stroke of painting with participles (*Image Grammar* 5). First, we will examine some examples of participles as used in “Young Arthur” by Richard D. San Souci. We will discuss the function of the participles as well as why the author may have chosen participles instead of other forms of description. Next, I will model writing a descriptive paragraph based on a photograph I will display on the smart board, using input and suggestions from students and being careful to distinguish participles from other uses of -ing verbs. I will then show students another photo and they will write their own participle-filled paragraphs describing the imagined action of it. Students may then share their paragraphs with the class if they choose.

Reading Materials: “Young Arthur” by Richard D. San Souci

Summary: This short story is an adaptation of the myth of the Sword in the Stone. Arthur, serving as his foster brother Kay’s apprentice, forgets to bring Sir Kay’s sword to a tournament in London. He sees a sword lodged in a stone and pulls it out to borrow it for the tournament, not realizing that the sword was placed there by Merlin bearing the inscription “whoso pullet the sword from this stone is born the rightful King of England.” Arthur gives the sword to Kay, who sees the inscription and tells his father he is the next king. Arthur is confused by the uproar and believes he has stolen a king’s weapon, so he goes to the square to turn himself in. When he arrives, Kay is trying to prove to Merlin how he pulled the sword from the stone and is unable to do so. Arthur pulls the sword from the stone again and is crowned the King of England. This story contains many familiar elements of legends and fairy tales students have heard before. Examining how these details are shown using participles will help them understand a new grammatical concept using familiar material.

Rationale: Students will see examples of participle usage from a published writer and witness my own writing process as I model with a think-aloud process. Using the photo as a prompt will encourage students to imagine the details and action of the scene using all of their senses. Students will then have the opportunity to share, so students can learn from each others’ examples but will not feel uncomfortably forced to share their writing.

7. Absolutes- Similar to Lesson #6, this lesson investigates describing scenes using absolutes (see Noden 6-8). I will follow Noden’s advice by introducing students with the sentence, “The mountain climber edged along the cliff” and then asking students to reimagine the sentence adding the phrases “hands shaking, feet trembling.” I will then ask students to suggest other absolutes and absolute phrases we could add to the base sentence. Using the analogy of “zooming in,” I will show students some example sentences and challenge them to come up with a few of their own sentences and share their favorites. This lesson will be used to enhance a larger creative writing project students are already writing, so their final step will be to edit their drafts using this technique to add detail.

Rationale: This lesson has a lot of flexibility depending on how easily students pick up the technique. If the students have already completed the participle lesson (#6), they will most likely understand this lesson with minimal extra help. If this lesson is needed before the participle lesson has been taught, more scaffolding can easily be added. This is one of the quickest lessons included in this set, but I want to avoid too much “overkill” before turning students loose with their own revisions. By doing simple practice with skeleton sentences and their own isolated sentences, students will be prepared to edit without being bored. I also debated including a minimum number of absolutes students must add in their revision, but I do not want their writing to become forced. Instead, students will be able to look at their writing with fresh eyes and add absolutes where they are most effective.

8. Passive vs. Active Voice- In this lesson we will compare the use of action verbs versus the use of “be” verbs. I will incorporate this lesson into the editing stage of a creative writing assignment. First, we will compare as a class several sentences using both active and passive voice. For example, the sentences discussed in Noden’s *Image Grammar* (11): “The runaway horse was ridden into town by an old, white-whiskered rancher,” and “The grocery store was robbed by two armed men.” We will discuss how the sentences could be rewritten into active voice and how the change affects the sentence. We will then discuss sentences that are more effective in passive voice and why an author may choose to leave sentences passive. For example, Weaver’s sentence in *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*: “Garbage is collected on Mondays.” As a class we will discuss the reasoning for using passive or active voice, and students will offer examples of each and their reasoning. Using students’ existing drafts, I will ask students to carefully consider the verbs in each of their sentences and their reasoning for the choice. Since junior high students generally use too much passive voice, they will be required to annotate their draft with their reasoning for each passive verb they use to encourage thoughtful editing. I will model this process with my own sample text.

Rationale: I am comparing active and passive voice in an attempt to avoid the mythrule of “never write in passive tense.” Students should be conscientious about their verb tense choices and should be aware of the appropriate settings for each choice. By requiring students to explain their tense choices, students will

be thoughtful about their reasoning, which will hopefully carry over to other writing assignments when those annotations are not required.

9. **Introductory Leads-** This lesson is designed to be used as part of a research essay assignment after students have collected their data and ideas. After discussing the importance of an effective introduction, we will examine the models provided by Noden (207-213) to get an idea of the different types of leads. Then I will model each approach using a topic none of the students are writing about using a think-aloud technique combined with student input to make the lesson more interactive. These samples will need to be brief to keep students' attention and get through the lesson in one class period. After modeling each option, students will choose two options and write an introduction using each of them. After writing, students will share their leads with a partner, get feedback, and choose which introduction they feel is more effective.

Rationale- My goal for this lesson is to give students choices and ideas about different options for effective introductions without overwhelming them or overloading them with work. Students will see two different examples of each introduction, and choosing two different types of leads to write will require students to think beyond just their first idea. Students will then get feedback about the effectiveness of their two drafts to help them choose the best option and further improve it.

10. **Body-** This lesson will be incorporated with a research essay assignment after students have gathered research and formed their main points, building on lesson #9. To get an idea of each of Noden's four "piano keys" (213-215), I will return to the topic I wrote about previously. Before the lesson, I will write an example paragraph for each key. Before sharing these paragraphs with the class, I will lead them in a discussion of the benefits and differences of each type of support. We will briefly brainstorm how a writer might use each type of support for our topic, and then I will show them my example paragraphs. We will discuss the effect each type of support might have on the reader and how they can be combined in different "melodies." Students will then go through the research they have already accumulated and identify which types of support they already have and which types are lacking. As homework, students will organize their sources in the order they plan to use them in their

papers and conduct more research to fill in the gaps. Students will be expected to use each type of support at least once in their essay. In the next class, we will discuss the orders students chose and their reasoning so students can compare different choices.

Rationale: This lesson will introduce students to their choices for organization as well as the rhetorical reasons for different types of support. Students will see published examples as well as examples from me that fit the expectations of their own assignment. Students are immediately applying this new knowledge to their own writing and discussing their choices and reasoning to learn from each other. My hope is that students who do not immediately understand the “piano keys” from my instruction will grow in understanding from our class discussion. I am also hoping that students will learn to create stronger arguments by including more types of support. While this lesson covers only a short amount of time, these are topics I will continue to discuss throughout the research writing process as my students are most likely writing their first research essay ever.

11. Conclusion- This is the third in a series of lessons for the research writing process, and should be implemented after students have written a complete draft. Conclusions are the most difficult part of writing for me, and I have always struggled to teach them effectively, especially for junior high students who tend to want to summarize using “in conclusion.” To help students get out of this trap, I will first outline for students the three qualities Noden notes from Fletcher (215): emphasize the point of the article, provide a climax, and help readers remember your piece.” First, we will look at Noden’s three examples and discuss the differences and effectiveness of all three (216). I will then ask students to pair up and work together to write a conclusion to the writing we have been working on together from previous lessons, which I will display on the smart board. After a reasonable amount of work time, I will ask volunteers to share their conclusions and as a class we can evaluate what each conclusion does well according to the three qualities. Students will then return to their own work and evaluate how well their current conclusion fulfills the three qualities. Students will edit and rewrite their conclusions using the three qualities as a guide. After completing their conclusions (either later in the class period or the next class) students will peer edit each other’s papers, paying special

attention to the ideas covered in these three lessons (intro, body, and conclusion) to provide feedback overall and how the conclusion ties up all of these ideas.

Rationale: I am deliberately giving students less guidance and instruction in this lesson so they may be creative and focus on their actual writing assignment. My fear is that students will want to follow a formula in writing their conclusion, so I am trying to expose them to several different, yet equally effective examples. By seeing the three examples in Noden and hearing the different conclusions the pairs came up with, students will see that they have several options for writing effective conclusions; they don't have to follow a boring, overused formula. Students will then have an opportunity to write their own conclusions and get feedback on them to see what they have done effectively and what isn't quite coming across to the audience or what they may have missed.

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Implementing Standards-Based Grading Using Research-Supported Methods in Junior High
(Revision)

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ENG 6200

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Introduction

A common complaint among teachers is that there is too much to teach and not enough time. Teachers combat this problem by simplifying, focusing on key concepts, bundling several concepts into one project, and multitasking. Even with these strategies, teachers still struggle with to balance the different areas of the curriculum and the competing pedagogical approaches. Some teachers rely on one or two pedagogical approaches to drive all of their instruction, but they run the risk of alienating students who do not respond well to those approaches. On the other hand, using too many different approaches can make a course feel disjointed or inconsistent. These lessons utilize several pedagogical approaches with the intent to appeal to the widest range of students. While the approaches are varied, I also use some guiding principles and unifying themes to add consistency to the course. For example, collaboration and developing student voice are recurring themes in my classroom and occur several times in the following lessons.

Context

Hayfield is a small community located in rural Southeastern Minnesota, home to a K-12 school with about 340 students in grades 6-12. Our school has an eight-period schedule which rotates with six 57-minute periods a day, so each class meets 3-4 times per week. My class size ranges from 15-30. The English department consists of three teachers, and my own teaching assignment currently includes grades 6, 7, 11, and College English. The English department has experienced many changes and transitions in the last five years, and we are currently beginning to transition to elective-style semester classes and standards-based grading in the upper grades. My English 11 class this year is piloting standards-based grading, and based on my experience

with it so far, other grades would benefit from adopting a standards-based grading style. My goal in this project is to create a writing curriculum for grades 7 and 8 that incorporates standards-based grading, utilizes research-supported instructional strategies, and effectively meets the ELA standards of the state of Minnesota and the Hayfield School District.

Standards-based grading is a relatively new trend in education which emphasizes student mastery of specific standards and learning targets. Rather than being given one grade for a project that includes several distinct skills, students are given a separate score for each standard that is assessed. Students can be reassessed on these skills several times throughout the year, and only their most recent score is counted in their overall course grade, so students are not punished for not knowing the material early in the course as long as they master the skills by the end of the course. Various scales are used to assess these standards, but our district has adopted a 4-point scale, with a four considered "mastery," three "approaching," two "developing" and one "beginning." Scores of three to four are considered passing, and students are expected to reassess on lower scores until they reach the point of passing. This system also emphasizes formative work (homework or practice assignments) as practice, and as such poor formative performance should not detrimentally affect the student's grade. Our district implements this principle by scoring all formative assignments with one point for assignments that are fully completed on time and with good effort, or zero points for assignments that are incomplete, late, or show poor effort. These formative assignments are weighted as 20-30 percent of the overall grade for seventh and eighth grades, while the summative scores make up the remainder of the course grade.

My Teaching Philosophy

I believe in creating a classroom atmosphere of creativity, inquiry, and mutual respect. I hold my students to high standards and encourage them to grow emotionally, socially, and intellectually by creating a safe environment and engaging, challenging, and meaningful curriculum. Using engaging activities and relevant content, I work to teach students the skills they will need in the future and instill a love of learning that will serve students in any educational and vocational paths they may choose. One of the core elements of my teaching philosophy is a strong connection between reading and writing. In my classes we read literary texts as models and inspiration for writing as well as for their literary value. Writing serves as a way to sort out what we have read and a way to communicate ideas with an audience. In other words, we write to learn and to show what we have learned. While reading and media literacy are also important aspects of my class, for the purposes of this document I will be focusing only on the writing aspect of my curriculum, with brief mentions of other aspects of the class where relevant.

My Teaching Writing Philosophy:

Writing is an essential skill for all students in school and life. With the increased use of technology in modern life, the written word is more prevalent and easily accessible than ever before, and effective writing is becoming even more important for students, from traditional research papers, to job applications, to blog posts and online discussions. At the junior high level, we will study grammar concepts that can be applied in any writing situation, and we will write in a variety of forms and genres. Some assignments will be informal, personal, reflective, and creative. These formative assignments are meant for students to practice and “stretch their wings” as writers without fear of failure. Other assignments will be more formal, academic, and developed. They are intended to help students learn the process of drafting, editing, and revising

to create more polished writing. The standards by which students are assessed will vary with each assignment based on the skills being developed and assessed.

A Note about Teamwork

Several of the projects we do in my class involve partner or team work. I do this consciously because students live in an age of collaboration, and interpersonal communication and teamwork are vital skills in most workplaces. Depending on the assignment, students will either be placed into groups by me or they will be allowed to choose their own groups. Regardless, the group will all receive the same scores for their work, and I will expect a higher quality of work from a group than I would a single individual. If it is apparent that certain group members are not contributing fairly, that student will complete a separate, independent assignment with the opportunity to earn full credit. The decision of whether or not a student participated equally in the group will be made by me with the input of the rest of the group.^{i, ii}

Seventh Grade

Overall structure: Units are structured in a way to build from the most familiar concepts to the most challenging. I strive for as much connection between reading and writing as possible, so most writing relates in some way to reading we are doing as well (not all reading is mentioned here). I try to make connections to other content areas, current events, and student interests as much as possible to demonstrate the relevance of what we are doing in class. These details will be filled in as the year progresses.

Ongoing projects/activities

- Personal Reflection Journal (1st semester)

Standard: 7.7.10.10

Structure: Students will have a section of their notebook specifically dedicated as their journal. Each week they will write at least half a page about a prompt I will provide. These journals will be graded formatively for one point as I circulate through the class while they are writing, making some specific encouraging or guiding comments about my observations of their writing.

Pedagogical Approach: Expressivist

Rationale: Student journals are an opportunity for them to write in a “safe space” where they do not need to worry about structure, grammar, or word choice. The purpose is to get them thinking and to practice writing to learn, not necessarily writing to show their learning. ⁱⁱⁱ

- Class Online Discussion Forum (2nd semester)

Standards: 7.7.6.6, 7.9.1.1, 7.9.8.8

Structure: Each week students will be required to post on our class’s Moodle discussion board. The posts must be at least seven sentences long. Some weeks I will post a prompt for students to respond to involving class material or current events. Other weeks students will be able to write about anything they want, as long as it is school appropriate and maintains an academic tone and focus. For example, a student could write about something they learned in class, information about a current event in the news or at school, a review of a movie or video game, or a creative piece they have written. Students will also be expected to comment on at least two other students’ posts each week. Comments must be at least three sentences long and must add to the discussion of the original topic. Grades will be formative and will be based on content, participation, and clear communication.

Pedagogical Approach: New Media

Rationale: Online discussion gives students who may hesitate to speak in class an opportunity to be heard. It also facilitates discussion in a way that a traditional class discussion could not. Students have time to think about their responses, they can respond to each other at different times, and everyone can contribute without drowning out any comments. With the growth of online communication and increased instances of cyberbullying, learning how to use a discussion board in a classroom setting also presents an opportunity to teach students how to communicate responsibly and effectively online.^{iv, v, vi}

- Vocabulary and Spelling Tests

Standards: 7.11.4.4, 7.11.6.6

Structure: Students will learn seven units of twenty vocabulary words, with each unit on a four-week schedule: ten words week one, ten words week two, spelling test week three, vocabulary test week four. The lists and exercises will come from Level B of *Vocabulary Workshop*, a multi-level vocabulary curriculum our district has adopted for grades 7-12. Formative practice will include writing, drawing, and working from an exercise book, and formative quizzes will include identifying part of speech, synonyms, antonyms, filling in sentences, and matching definitions.

Pedagogical Approach: Current-traditionalist

Rationale: Although this form of learning is less engaging than other approaches I use elsewhere, I believe students need to learn these foundational elements in a straightforward way to understand when and how to use them. This approach relies to some extent on memorization, but students will also be practicing and applying these skills daily through writing and class activities.^{vii}

- Literary Terms, Grammar, and NoRedInk

Standards: 7.11.1.1, 7.11.2.2, 7.11.3.3, 7.9.6.6

Structure: Students will take a pre-test of literary terms and grammatical concepts at the beginning of the year. They will then be divided into groups, and each group will be given a literary term or grammatical concept. Groups will work together to create a poster explaining the concept or term and present the poster to their class. The posters will be displayed around the room as reminders of these concepts throughout the year. Each week, I will teach a mini-lesson on a particular grammar concept, and students will complete related assigned modules on a website called NoRedInk, which allows students to complete customized exercises on various topics. NoRedInk is a helpful site because it reacts to students' answers, giving additional reinforcement for incorrect answers or moving on to other concepts when students reach mastery. Weekly exercises will be assessed as a formative point, and skills will be assessed summatively in periodic application assignments where students are expected to demonstrate these concepts in their own writing. Students will also complete a post-test at the end of the year to measure improvement compared to the pre-test scores. To encourage carry-over from the exercises to writing, students will be expected to demonstrate mastery of these concepts in all formal writing after they are taught in class.

Pedagogical Approach: Current-Traditional

Rationale: Students will be learning the building blocks of grammar in small, digestible chunks through weekly mini-lessons. This approach will prevent students from feeling too overwhelmed by grammar concepts, and the practice activities will give them repetition and opportunities to see grammar concepts applied in different situations. Students will also be expected to use these grammar concepts correctly in their writing, so grammar is not isolated just in these exercises.^{viii}

Unit plans

- Short Stories

Standards: 7.7.3.3, 7.11.5.5, 7.4.4.4, 7.7.4.4, 7.7.5.5

Structure: Students will read selected short stories and study literary elements such as characterization, plot development, figurative language, conflict, etc. Students will then write their own short stories, applying the strategies they studied. This assignment will be done in correlation with an area creative writing contest and will conform to contest rules, which include a length of 300-350 words and a given topic (previous topics include “The Day I Met...” or “In 25 Years...”). Students will write drafts for a formative grade, complete writing conferences, revise, and edit their papers to create a polished narrative without input from the teacher, and may choose to submit their story to the contest.

Pedagogical Approach: Expressivist, Literature and Composition Pedagogy

Rationale: Students will get the opportunity to see examples and identify elements of narratives in short stories before writing their own. The writing contest generally provides rather broad topics, which leave students with a great deal of freedom to choose the style, setting, characters, conflict, and genre of their stories, which will enable students to discover the expressive power of words. Students will also be practicing the writing process by completing multiple drafts, and their theoretical knowledge of literary elements will be strengthened by actually applying them in their writing.^{ix, x, xi}

- *A Christmas Carol* Compare and Contrast

Standards: 7.4.5.5, 7.4.7.7, 7.7.9.9

Structure: Students will read Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* and watch a movie adaptation of it. They will then compare and contrast the two versions and analyze in what ways each version

was more or less effective. The written analysis will be graded based on clarity, organization, use of supporting evidence, and conventions.

Pedagogical Approach: Literature and Composition

Rationale: For this assignment, literature will serve as the subject of students' writing.

Students will see a connection between classic literature and a popular modern interpretation, and they will respond to similarities and differences between them. In this assignment students will develop their writing skills along with their analytical and interpretive skills.

Supporting Research: xii, xiii

- Biography

Standards: 7.7.2.2, 7.5.6.6, 7.5.3.3, 7.9.5.5, 7.9.6.6, 7.7.4.4, 7.7.9.9, 7.7.6.6, 7.9.8.8

Structure: Students will read a biography (TBD) as a class and study how information is presented in informational nonfiction. Students will be divided into groups and each group will choose a significant historical figure to research. Each student will be responsible for researching and writing about a certain part of that person's life. These individual papers will be graded based on use of research and evidence, conventions, structure, and organization. Groups will then synthesize their research together into a comprehensive presentation about the person's entire life.

Pedagogical Approach: New Media, Collaborative

Rationale: Students will practice teamwork, research and documentation, synthesis, media literacy, and writing skills in this assignment. They are able to exercise choice, which will help them feel more ownership and get more involved in the assignment. They will also be presenting to the class, practicing oral communication skills. We will be studying a biography as a class, so

students can see an example of the text they are creating. Students will identify techniques and strategies used in the text and then apply them in their own work.^{xiv, xv, xvi}

- Research Presentation

Standards: 7.7.7.7, 7.9.4.4

Structure: Students will decide on a question they are curious about (e.g., what does o.k. stand for? How do rainbows work? Why do people sneeze?). Students will independently research their question, gathering several sources and as many explanations as possible. They will then decide which explanation is most plausible based on their evaluation of their sources. Students will create a presentation using their research that explores all possible explanations they found, then concluding which one is most reliable and explaining why it is the most likely choice.

Pedagogical Approach: Researched Writing

Rationale: Students' curiosity will drive this project, so students will be more interested in conducting research. Students will learn to evaluate source credibility, research thoroughly, identify the most convincing arguments, and synthesize their findings into a multimedia presentation with proper citations. Students will also practice presentation skills and oral communication. All of these skills are relevant and transferable to future English tasks and other content areas, with the main focus being on learning to evaluate source reliability and accurately use MLA format for citations.^{xvii, xviii}

- Persuasive Writing

Standards: 7.7.1.1, 7.5.1.1, 7.5.4.4, 7.9.3.3, 7.5.8.8, 7.9.7.7

Structure: Students will write a persuasive essay in the style of a journalistic editorial. They will choose an issue they are interested in, research all sides of the issue, find relevant and

credible sources, choose a side to support, and write an editorial, acknowledging and responding to opposing arguments. Students will be required to cite evidence from research in their editorial. Editorials will be at least 2 pages, double-spaced. Rough drafts will be formatively graded based on evidence and organization. Students will then do peer editing with a partner and revise their papers for a polished final draft. Final papers will be graded summatively based on evidence, organization, conventions, voice, and effectiveness.

Pedagogical approach: Rhetoric and Argumentation

Rationale: This research-based assignment will replace the traditional research paper students have been required to do in the past. Students will learn the skills of research, assessing source credibility, supporting a position, and source citation and documentation using a real-life genre of a newspaper editorial. This is a more authentic writing situation than a research paper, which only occurs in a school setting.^{xix, xx, xxi}

8th Grade

Overall structure: These units are designed to build on the skills learned in seventh grade and expand students' knowledge and independence as learners. The ongoing projects remain the same in structure and rationale, but the content is more advanced. Unit plans are structured in a similar way to seventh grade, from most basic to most complex. My goal in these assignments is to foster students' individual voice and encourage academic inquiry.

Ongoing Projects

- Grammar/NoRedInk

Standards: 8.1.1.1.1, 8.1.1.2.2, 8.1.3.3

(this will be the same as above for 7th grade Grammar)

- Vocabulary

Standards: 8.11.4.4, 8.11.6.6, 8.4.4.4

(this will be the same as above for 7th grade vocabulary)

- Personal Reflection Journal (first semester)

Standards: 8.7.10.10, 8.7.4.4

(this will be the same as above for 7th grade personal journals)

- Online Discussion Forum (second semester)

Standards: 8.7.6.6, 8.9.1.1, 8.7.4.4, 8.9.8.8

(this will be the same as above for 7th grade online discussion forum)

Unit Plans

- Short Stories, Poetry, and Creative Writing

Standards: 8.7.3.3, 8.7.5.5, 8.7.4.4, 8.4.4.4, 8.4.1.1, 8.4.6.6, 8.4.5.5, 8.11.5.5

Structure: Students will read various examples of short stories and poems, identify various literary elements and analyze how they are used, compare and contrast structures of poetry and narrative, and analyze the use of figurative language and symbolism. Students will then write a collection of creative writing centered around a theme of their choice. Students will write a short story of at least 2-3 pages, and at least four different styles of poems. Students may use font, graphics, and layout design artistically and appropriately. They will identify the literary elements they used in their writing, including figurative language, simile, metaphor, point of view, irony, etc. Students will participate in writing conferences to address problems they have identified in rough drafts and receive supportive guidance. Students will then revise and edit their writing for a summative final draft. Final projects will be graded on creativity, use of literary elements as specified in the assignment sheet, organization, conventions, and professional appearance.

Pedagogical Approach: Expressivist

Rationale: The rationale for this assignment is similar to the above rationale for seventh grade creative writing, although this assignment is slightly more elaborate and structured. I am adding in the element of poetry and requiring students to demonstrate their use of literary elements because they will have learned more elements of literature and they will also be studying the differences between genres. Students will be writing about the same theme in both forms to discover how different types of writing express similar ideas in different ways. ^{xxii, xxiii}

- *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Genocide

Standards: 8.4.3.3, 8.7.2.2, 8.9.4.4, 8.9.5.5, 8.7.7.7, 8.8.8, 8.5.10.10, 8.7.9.9, 8.7.4.4, 8.9.6.6

Structure: We will read *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a class and discuss the historical context of the Holocaust. After completing the play, students will be divided into groups and each group will be given a historical genocide to research. Each group will create a presentation explaining when, where, and how the genocide occurred, the historical context leading up to the genocide, and the aftermath. Students will be required to use reliable sources and cite them appropriately. After presentations, we will discuss as a class the general trends of how genocides occur and how they can be prevented in the future. Presentations will be graded based on use of sources, organization, presentation delivery and appearance, conventions, and amount of detail included.

Pedagogical Approach: Research Writing, Collaborative Writing, New Media

Rationale: In a strictly curriculum sense, this assignment will teach students skills in research, team work, presenting, and multimedia literacy. While students are not writing a traditional paper, they will still be gathering information from credible sources and writing in the form of a multimedia group presentation, which is a valuable real-life skill for students to develop. The topic of genocide makes an important connection to the drama *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which we will read as a class, and opens up the possibility of increasing students'

awareness of social justice and world affairs. This project is designed as a presentation so students will have an opportunity to learn about each other's topics to increase their global awareness, to encourage and facilitate group participation, and to save time in the context of the course overall. ^{xxiv, xxv, xxvi}

- Commercial Analysis

Standards: 8.9.3.3, 8.9.2.2, 8.9.7.7, 8.5.4.4, 8.5.7.7, 8.7.4.4, 8.9.6.6, 8.9.8.8

Structure: Students will view and analyze a variety of print, video, and audio commercials to determine the rhetorical devices and strategies used. In groups, students will then design their own fictional product and create a commercial advertising it. Groups will present their commercials to the class and hand in a written reflection of the rhetorical choices they made—why did they choose the words they did, what strategies they were using, why they chose the medium they did, etc. Projects will be graded on commercial creativity, effectiveness of rhetorical devices, professional quality of commercial, detail of reflection, and conventions.

Pedagogical Approach: New Media, Rhetoric and Argumentation, Collaborative Writing

Rationale: This assignment will get students thinking like an advertiser to see the rhetorical strategies surrounding them every day. They will learn to become smarter consumers by seeing through the strategies at work in advertising, and they will be applying them in their own advertisement. Students will also have the freedom to work with any technology they choose, whether it is a pencil and paper print advertisement, graphic design, video, or audio recording. Students will get to use technology creatively, practice teamwork, and practice rhetorical analysis skills in an authentic situation. ^{xxvii, xxviii, xxix, xxx}

- Persuasive Letters

Standards: 8.7.1.1, 8.5.8.8, 8.5.5.5, 8.5.6.6, 8.5.3.3, 8.5.1.1, 8.5.2.2

Structure: Students will read examples of persuasive letters and analyze rhetorical strategies used in persuasive writing. We will determine what makes particular examples more or less effective than others and identify bias in writing. Students will then brainstorm and select a topic of importance to them and write a persuasive letter to an appropriate audience (e.g. a teacher, principal, parent, business, etc.). We will research, write drafts, conduct multiple rounds of revision, practice peer editing, craft arguments supported by evidence, acknowledge counterarguments, and use rhetorical strategies. These letters will be graded based on supporting evidence, organization, rhetorical strategies, conventions, and proper letter format.

Pedagogical Approach: Rhetoric and Argumentation

Rationale: Students will be writing these letters with a real audience in mind, which will motivate them to write high quality letters. Students will also be practicing research and documentation, rhetorical skills, the technical writing format of a business letter, rhetorical analysis of example letters, and the writing process using peer editing. These rhetorical skills can be transferred to many different situations, from verbal argumentation to traditional research papers, and the other writing skills practiced in this assignment will be applied in many future writing assignments. ^{xxxi, xxxii}

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Investigating the Investigator: Various Roles of Police in Contemporary Domestic Noir Fiction
(Revision)

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ENG 6800: Haunted Women in Literature

Dr. Piya Lapinski

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Crime writing has a long history within the field of fiction, and throughout that history the representation of the police has changed. Detective novels emerged in English in the mid-nineteenth century, and since then the genre has expanded to include several sub-genres, including whodunits, hard-boiled detective novels, locked-room mysteries, police procedurals, and legal or psychological thrillers. Throughout this wide history, a common feature has been the presence and representation of police. Frequently, the police serve as a representation of an authoritative power structure that exerts authority over civilian characters through observation and law enforcement. In recent years, contemporary crime fiction has explored subversion of this dynamic through strong female characters that undermine the traditional power structure.

This essay considers how the representation of the modern literary police officer in two contemporary novels differs from the “hard-boiled detectives” of the past. Two British novels, *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins (2015) and *Under the Harrow* by Flynn Berry (2016), provide a glimpse into some of the ways contemporary fiction portrays law enforcement’s role and purpose. In these two novels the police function as a patriarchal source of authority and control for the general population, and their power is demonstrated through interactions with civilian characters (particularly the female protagonists), the media within the texts, and the investigation process.

The role of the police and their relationship with the main characters in each of these novels displays effect of institutional power structures on female characters. In both cases, the female protagonists find themselves at odds against a dominant police power structure, which they must subvert to reach the story’s resolution. *The Girl on the Train* includes a relatively straightforward relationship between the main characters and the police. Rachel, the main

narrator in the novel, is an unemployed alcoholic who inserts herself into the investigation of Megan's (a secondary character, but the primary plot focus of the text) disappearance. Rachel believes she has important information about the case, and in an attempt to be helpful she becomes obsessed with Megan and the people around her, including Rachel's ex-husband and his new wife, Anna. While the police initially take Rachel seriously, they quickly become irritated with her intrusion into the case when they realize her information is not reliable. Eventually the investigators refuse to give Rachel details about the case, and she begins working independently of the police to solve the case herself. Megan's disappearance immediately gained national attention in the news, and the police seemed to be struggling to keep up with the media's own investigation and sensationalism. The police take a back seat in the narrative, and at the end, Rachel and Anna solve the case together by recognizing a different patriarchal force in the form of Tom, Rachel's ex-husband and Anna's current husband. They work together and kill Megan's murderer (Tom), and escape punishment by claiming they killed him out of self-defense, an arguably false claim. Anna and Rachel undermine the authority of the police and challenge the patriarchal power dynamic of the law enforcement by investigating, judging, sentencing, and punishing Tom with their own authority and by their own hands. The police take a back seat to the female embodiment of power that subverts the traditional power dynamic and puts females in a dominant position over both the police and the man who had previously dominated them in abusive relationships.

In *Under the Harrow* the portrayal of the police and their relationship with the main character, Nora, is less straightforward. Nora arrives at her sister Rachel's house at the beginning of the novel to find her and her dog brutally murdered. She quickly meets two detectives, and she has very different relationships with each of them. While DI Moretti is more involved in the case

than DI Lewis, Nora forms a deeply familiar relationship with the latter, to the point that he is accused of “professional misconduct” due to their personal interactions, although they were misconstrued. As the story unfolds, it is clear that the police are reluctant to share all of the details of their investigation with Nora because she is a suspect in the case, and seemingly for good reason. Nora and Rachel did not have the harmonious relationship that Nora originally suggested, and in fact they had previously fought physically. Several flashbacks throughout the text reveal contradictions in Nora’s narration surrounding the night Rachel was killed and the night Rachel was assaulted several years prior. Physical evidence suggests Nora may have stalked Rachel before she died. Rachel appeared to be planning to run away. Nora’s boyfriend had an affair with Rachel. As more evidence comes to light, Nora’s recollection of the events changes and her role in them becomes questionable, as does her reliability as a narrator. In the end, Nora discovers Rachel’s real killer, but by this point her reliability is so questionable that the reader wonders how much of Nora’s narration is even real.

Several ideological structures are in place in these novels’ focus on interactions among female citizens and police officers. One main role of cultural ideological power is found in the press and its ability to spin or portray information that is shared with the public. In an important contrast to *The Girl on the Train*, where news coverage considerably impacts the investigation, the detectives in *Under the Harrow* are determined to keep the press out of this case, so Rachel’s murder receives much less media attention than Megan’s. In some ways, less attention makes it easier for the detectives to conduct a “clean” investigation since there are fewer false leads brought on by media attention. Conversely, less news coverage also makes it easier for the police to abandon the case after a short time. Since there is less public outcry to solve Rachel’s murder, the police lack the ideological oversight to keep their attention on the case. Instead, Nora is

driven to solve the case herself by her need to prove herself innocent and avenge her sister's death. Nora takes the case into her own hands, , eventually discovers who the culprit is, and gathers the necessary evidence to hand him over to the police (after threatening him at gunpoint). As in *The Girl on the Train*, it is a civilian woman, not the police, who solves the crime.

One must examine many angles of the police in these novels, including the role of law enforcement as an authority figure and social control, the officers' relationships with other characters (particularly from a feminist perspective), and the relationship of the police and the media. D.A. Miller explores this role in *The Novel and the Police*, where he follows the work of Michel Foucault to explain several factors of discipline and the goal of policing. He states that discipline includes "unseen but all-seeing surveillance" that is not identified with any particular institution, and "a regime of the norm" which diffuses normalizing practices "throughout the social fabric" (viii). Third, he adds, discipline requires "various technologies of the self and its sexuality, which administer the subject's own contribution to the intensive and continuous 'pastoral' care that liberal society proposes to take of each and every one of its charges" (viii). Miller continues,

To label all this 'the police' thus anticipates moving the question of policing out on the streets, as it were, into the closet—I mean, into the private and domestic sphere on which the very identity of the liberal subject depends. Though ordinarily off-limits to the police, this sphere is nonetheless, I argue, a highly active site for the production and circulation of a complex power whose characteristically minor, fluid, and 'implicit' operations distract our attention from the unprecedented density of its regulation. (ix)

In short, Miller broadens the definition of the police to include them in the domestic sphere, which is exactly what happens for the women in these two novels, as the police suddenly become

closely involved in the intimate details of their personal lives through the course of the investigations. The detectives enact a power dynamic that puts them in a position of authority over even the minutest details of the women's personal lives.

The police officers in these novels join a long-recognized trope of investigators in crime fiction. Historically, fictional detectives serve as facilitators to the audience's own investigation, leading them through the mass of potential clues. Miller explains, "The classical detective story disposes of an interestingly paradoxical economy, at once prodigal and parsimonious. On one hand, the form is based on the hypothesis that *everything might count*.... Yet on the other hand, even though the criterion of total relevance is continually invoked by the text, it turns out to have a highly restricted applicability in the end" (33). Although the audience has been challenged throughout the novel to believe any little detail may be the key to it all, at the moment of truth the texts reveals very few relevant signifiers and many more irrelevant ones. Miller goes on to describe what this means for the police as authority figures and the characters as the subjects of that authority:

One may take a further step: the detective story is invariable the story of a power play. The quasi-universal suspicion is only another way of putting the quasi-total investigation. When the sheer fact of meaningfulness incriminates and has a policing force, the limits of the detective's knowledge become the limits of his power as well: his astonishing explications double for a controlee exercised in the interests of law and order. Detective fiction is thus always implicitly punning on the detective's brilliant *super-vision* and the police *supervision* that it embodies. His intervention marks an explicit bringing-under-surveillance of the entire world of the narrative. As such, it can be alarming. (34-35)

The reader can easily see evidence of this bringing-under-surveillance for the leading women in both of these novels. Suddenly, the characters, their pasts, and their secrets are examined in minute detail. For Nora in *Under the Harrow*, this authority takes the shape of the police investigating the secrets of her past—a fight with Rachel the night she was attacked as a teenager, the girls’ absentee father, even what she bought and how much she drank on the afternoon of her sister’s murder. While on one hand the police are simply doing their job to investigate every possibility thoroughly, at the same time they are using their authority as law enforcement officers to invade every area of Nora’s private life.

The Girl on the Train demonstrates police authority in a different manner. Rachel is investigated, but not as extensively as Nora is in *Under the Harrow*. The murder victim, Megan, however, has the dark secrets of her past exposed by both the police and the media to the entire nation. It is revealed that several years before, Megan had a baby who accidentally drowned when Megan fell asleep in the bath with her, and her therapist divulges the thoughts and feelings she had shared with him during their sessions. While these details are intended to help the investigation, there is no reason for them to be shared with Rachel, not to mention the rest of the country. In the end, these facts are irrelevant to the investigation but are used only as sensational headlines to sell newspapers. In both of these cases the police have exercised a power play, as Miller says, to exert control over the women and extend their own power by extending their knowledge. Even though Nora and Rachel ended up being uninvolved in the initial crimes of these novels, the police, with their vast knowledge of both women’s lives, could easily have implicated them in the crime had the women not solved the crimes themselves.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains in more detail how the examination, or investigation in this case, can be used to exert power over the subject, writing,

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. (183)

The women of these novels, then, are subjected to a hierarchy which places their investigators in a position of power. However, as Miller clarifies, while the novel imposes this system of power on the characters, it never embraces it. Instead, “the novel systematically gives power an unfavorable press. What more than power, for instance, serves to distinguish bad characters from good? [T]he characters who openly solicit power are regularly corrupted by it.... If they are to remain good, good characters may only assume power when...they are seeking to neutralize the negative effects of a ‘prior’ instance of it” (31). While Miller was not specifically discussing *Under the Harrow* or *The Girl on the Train*, his commentary holds true for these novels. While our characters may be experiencing a misogynistic legal system, the book itself is not misogynistic because it portrays the system negatively.

By being subjected to this examination, the protagonists are stripped of any power of their own because they are at the mercy of the detective’s investigation and judgment. Foucault continues, “It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification” (184). The women being examined will be subjected to this power dynamic as long as the investigation continues. It is only through reaching a conclusion of the

case that these women can escape their powerless state, which is exactly what they do at the ends of both novels..

The Girl on the Train and *Under the Harrow* are only two examples of novels in a long history of crime-centered fiction, including hallmarks such as Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie, as well as the serial detective novels popular throughout the twentieth century. This popularity has also pervaded television, with shows like *CSI*, *NCIS*, *Law and Order* and more exploring the world of crime investigation. Unlike those books and shows, however, these novels do not focus centrally around the police investigation but rather on civilian women independently investigating crimes close to them. In discussing *The Moonstone*, Miller describes a similar situation:

In short order, the text organizes itself as a movement from mystery to solution supervised by an extraordinary police detective. It comes somewhat as a puzzle, then, when the text abandons the scenario it has so conscientiously set up.... The detective disappears from what remains a novel of detection, and although he reappears to clear up some incidental matters at the end, the mystery is solved *without his doing*. (37)

In *The Moonstone* as well as *Under the Harrow* and *The Girl on the Train*, what appears to be a novel about detectives working to solve a mystery ends up being more about the mystery itself, with the detectives fading from view and the mystery being solved without them. Miller explains, “In the same move whereby the police are contained in a marginal pocket of the representation, the work of the police is superseded by the operations of another, informal, and extralegal principle of organization and control” (3). In these novels, that informal principle is the women who decide to pursue justice on their own and solve the crimes themselves.

By shifting the focus away from the actual investigational proceedings, the novels are better able to focus on the thematic elements and social commentary of the books. As Miller says, “The centrality of what it [the novel] puts at the center is established by holding the police to their place on the periphery.... the marginality is dramatized as a gradual process of marginalization, in which police work becomes less and less relevant to what the novel is ‘really’ about” (3). For *The Girl on the Train*, the police procedural is pushed out of the way to make room for focus on domestic violence, addicted and abusive personalities, the effects of alcoholism, and to an extent class disparity in the UK. In *Under the Harrow*, police effectiveness remains a big theme, but as the focus shifts from the detectives to Nora’s own investigation, the central topic becomes domestic violence. This theme is developed as details surrounding the story are revealed to the reader, including Rachel’s past relationship, the ghosts that continued to haunt her, and her research into other cases, especially the local couple Louise and Callum.

As mentioned earlier, the media play a significant role in *The Girl on the Train* and almost no role at all in *Under the Harrow*. In both novels, the involvement of and attitude towards the media are drastically different and reflective of various attitudes and situations in modern society. Huey and Broll explore the relations between the media and the public in reality in their article “All It Takes is One TV Show to Ruin It: A Police Perspective on Police-Media Relations in an Era of Expanding Prime Time Crime Markets.” Although this article focuses on Canadian crime TV, it raises some universal concerns about the representation of police in the media. In the realm of the novel, this is a two-fold scenario: first, the relationship between the fictional police and the fictional media within the novel itself, and second portrayal of fictional police to real-life readers. The article explains that while negative representations and stories of police deviance are “viewed with consternation” by police officers, positive representations can

also be troublesome because they will increase public expectations of “crime fighting wizardry or superhuman patience, tact, and integrity” (384). In light of recent tensions between police and the public, these representations have become an increasingly sensitive topic.

Beyond the world of fiction, recent scrutiny of police departments has also heightened concern for the portrayal of police in news media. Police forces often want to work together with the media to get the best representation possible, but they are often unable to be completely transparent in media relations. In fact, police agencies often have specific policies regarding what must be excluded from discussions with the media (385). Often, this secrecy is justified in that disclosing the information could “jeopardize investigations and adversely influence the production and value of evidence” (386). Police forces also seek to maintain the privacy of the civilians involved in investigations (victims, vulnerable individuals like youths, or those involved in sensitive matters like sexual offenses). The police often seek to maintain secrecy over certain details to avoid sharing details such as specific investigative tactics with the criminal population (386). In *Under the Harrow*, a major detail of the plot is that the police refuse to tell the media that the victim’s dog was found hanging from its neck at the scene of the crime. They justified retaining this detail to avoid the story becoming a national sensation because people fixate on gory or sordid details. Their strategy works because the case gains very little media attention and is quickly brushed aside by nearly everyone, including the police.

In direct contrast to *Under the Harrow*, *The Girl on the Train* features a disappearance/murder that immediately gains national attention. Huey and Broll explain that in reality, police often try to get media attention to solicit the public’s help for high profile cases, but if the police do not solve the case quickly, the plan may backfire, causing members of the media and the public to question their competence. On the other hand, receiving a lot of media

attention could present an opportunity for an agency to get more funding or resources (386). All of these elements are at play in these two novels. In *The Girl on the Train*, Detectives Gaskill and Riley feel the pressure of keeping up with the media coverage as more and more sensational details make headlines across the country. The detectives fear looking incompetent with a lengthy case, so they look for a quick end, but they also fear reaching the wrong conclusion.

While Gaskill and Riley are forced to action through media coverage, Lewis and Moretti in *Under the Harrow* seem afraid to make any moves for fear of negative press. Lewis explains to Nora that they are unlikely to press any charges at all unless they are almost certain to win, lest they gain a bad reputation for shoddy detective work. They avoid gaining any media attention by not revealing any sordid details, and since there is no public outcry for answers, the detectives quickly move on to the next case that comes along. In this detail, the book brings light to two significant problems for police agencies: First, the police are allowed to abandon the case so quickly, and second, the detectives are stretched so thin that they *need* to abandon the case.

Contesting patriarchal forces are at work within the institutions of the police force and the traditionally male detective novel. Crime fiction of this genre has existed since the nineteenth century when it became popularized by Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, but it is relatively recently that women have been gaining much traction in the genre. Earlier female detective characters and writers existed (for example Agatha Christie and Nancy Drew), but they have always operated within a masculine framework. The women have been expected to act within a certain set of expectations that many see as deeply misogynistic. As Cavender and Jurik explain, “Women appear as sex objects, as seductresses (femme fatale characters) or as victims” (12). Peter Messent echoes this sentiment in his article quoting Marty Roth that “‘in detective fiction gender is genre and genre is male’ with women only figuring to ‘flesh out male desire and

shadow male sexual fear” (Messent). The women of these two novels appear to be victims of patriarchal power structures, but in fact they are challenging the order of patriarchal and institutional power. Nora and Rachel act as both the detectives and suspects, and although they are subjected to the masculine framework of the official investigation, in the end they both overcome the system by solving the mysteries outside of the police force. Challenging the traditional system signifies a change in the power dynamic and a shift in the role of women in crime fiction as shown in these two novels.

In recent years there has been “an outpouring of women’s crime fiction. Moreover, many of the critics who question the genre’s suitability for women note that, to a degree, women are subverting its problematic traditions” (13). Recent years have seen a rise of truly strong female characters and storylines that avoid the gratuitous violence against women that is rampant in crime fiction as a whole. Traditionally, the genre has been full of “young women whose murders are depicted with titillation.... the audience, especially men, derive pleasure in looking at and identifying with the men on the screen. Violence against women becomes a kind of pornography desire” (21). In the relatively new feminist crime genre, there is less of this violence and when women are killed, “it is less likely as women and more likely for some narrative reason (e.g., they know too much)” (21). This development is not only a relief for any feminist reader who realized the problematic nature of the genres traditional tendencies, but also opens up new opportunities for feminist writers and other minorities who found themselves underrepresented. By redefining the genre without these problematic features, the genre’s “limits have been challenged as 'racial and gendered minorities have found voice and visibility', and have used the genre for their own particular ideological ends” (Messent). Formerly marginalized populations

are not only more likely to read the newly redefined genre, but also more likely to add their own voices to the crime fiction canon.

Under the Harrow and *The Girl on the Train* are excellent examples of how feminist writers have been able to break into this genre and redefine it to open new opportunities for strong feminist voices in crime fiction. Both novels are written by women, feature female protagonists, and are far more focused on female characters than males. In fact, all of the male characters are either detectives (enactors of the patriarchal system), murderers, or murder suspects. While the women are also far from perfect, they are in general strong, dynamic characters who work to challenge the power structures (e.g. the legal system) that hold them back. Thus, they enact the feminist crime genre as Cavender and Jurik explain it: “The new genre reflects women’s real-life dilemma: trusting a patriarchal legal system versus women’s autonomy at the cost of vulnerability to violence. In such a situation, Klein suggests, the detective’s quest is more for truth, even a painful truth, than for justice” (23). While these women do seek justice in its own way, they are not operating within the established justice system, and they are looking more for closure and redemption than anything else. Nora and Rachel (when she was still alive) in *Under the Harrow* dedicated themselves to finding and punishing domestic abusers, righting the wrongs done to women in their own way. In *The Girl on the Train*, Rachel’s quest to solve Megan’s murder was about finding her own redemption and giving her life purpose just as much as it was about finding the killer. Both of these women are required to work outside of the oppressive system of the police in order for them to complete their journeys of investigation, justice, and repentance. Just as the feminist authors subvert a misogynist and male-dominated genre with these books, the civilian female protagonists subvert

the patriarchal system of the police and challenge it as they pursue their own truth from outside of the justice system.

While these novels do not fit the traditional police-driven genres of crime fiction focused on investigational proceedings and detective work, they are still crime-focused. The power of investigation has shifted into the hands of female civilians in both of these texts, and their ability to succeed in finding the killer marks an empowering change in the patriarchal dynamic of the traditional police-civilian relationship. While the stories are fascinating in their own right on many levels, examining the relationship and role of the police forces in *Under the Harrow* and *The Girl on the Train* provides an intriguing insight into current-day police roles, relationships with the public and the media, and the power structures at work in our legal system. From a feminist perspective, they demonstrate strong feminist characters challenging the oppressive systems they face, and the novels themselves bring a new feminist voice to a traditionally masculine genre. These novels provide unique commentaries on authority, investigation, media, and feminism within the crime writing genre.

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